

threats. You clearly see the opportunities. And I want to thank you for your strong leadership, and thank you for your friendship.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:35 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence. In his remarks, he referred to Aliza Olmert, wife of Prime Minister Olmert; and Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon.

Remarks in Jerusalem

May 14, 2008

Thank you all. President Peres, thank you, sir, for your hospitality. Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Olmert, it's great to be with you. We consider you friends. Heads of state, thank you all for coming. I think it's a great tribute to this conference, as well as to Israel, that so many heads of state have come. Ex-heads of state and ex-leaders, thanks for being here. Save a seat in the ex-leader's club. [*Laughter*] Citizens of Israel, Laura and I loved coming to your beautiful country, and thank you for your warm hospitality. Citizens of the United States, my fellow Americans, spend freely, and behave yourselves. [*Laughter*]

Distinguished guests, I really appreciate your warm welcome. And we are thrilled to be here with one of America's closest friends. Laura and I are honored to represent the American people on the 60th anniversary of your independence. Happy birthday.

As we celebrate the anniversary, it is useful to look back at the story of your founding. It is the story of how faith guided the Jewish people through centuries of bitter exile. It is a story of how those living behind ghetto walls and barbed wire never lost sight of Jerusalem. It is a story of how brave pioneers risked everything to redeem the promise of this land. It is a marvelous story.

When Israel's founders gathered in Tel Aviv to sign your Declaration of Independence, the threat of war loomed. But it could not overshadow the joy of people who had lived to see their prayers answered. Celebrations broke out all across this land, and of course, they broke out in America as well. In New York, young men and women danced the *hora* in the streets. In Washington, a crowd gathered to watch a flag-raising cere-

mony outside the building that would become Israel's first Embassy. After one man saw the flag bearing the Star of David, he said, "I never thought I'd live to see this day."

Looking back 60 years later, it is important to remember what the founders of Israel had to overcome at every stage of the journey. They established one of the world's great democracies in a region where democracy had few roots. They formed a unified army out of immigrants and refugees from many different countries. They planted the seeds of a modern economy in the sands of an ancient desert. In these accomplishments, we see the visionary leadership of men and women like Herzl and Weizmann and Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir and Rabin and Sharon, and we honor each of them this evening.

And looking back 60 years later, we've also got to remember the courage of President Harry S. Truman. As Israel prepared to declare independence, President Truman faced a tough choice over whether to recognize a new state. The future of Israel hung in the balance. As Chaim Weizmann told the President, he said, "History and providence have placed this issue in your hands." And today, we know that the forces of providence could not have chosen a better man than America's 33d President.

Eleven minutes after Israel came into existence, the United States became the first nation to recognize its independence. And because Harry Truman did what was right instead of following the conventional wisdom, we can say today that America is Israel's oldest and best friend in the world.

With every passing year, the bonds of friendship between America and Israel have grown stronger. America stands for peace, and so does Israel. And as we stand in peace, we must understand the realities of the world in which we live. We must be steadfast and we must be strong in the face of those who murder the innocent to achieve their objectives. And in the long run, we share a powerful belief in a powerful weapon against the terrorists. We believe that the surest way to defeat the enemies of hatred is to advance the cause of hope through the cause of freedom—liberty as the great alternative to tyranny and terror.

Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for inviting me to speak at the Knesset tomorrow. I hear it's a place of many a sharp elbow. [Laughter] I'm looking forward to giving my speech. [Laughter] I'm not going to be throwing any elbows. But I will talk about the day when I believe every child in the Middle East can live in peace and live in freedom. With trust in the Rock of Israel, we know that day will come. And when it does, the United States of America will be at your side.

God bless Israel, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 p.m. at the ICC Jerusalem International Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; and Aliza Olmert, wife of Prime Minister Olmert.

Remarks to Members of the Knesset in Jerusalem

May 15, 2008

Thank you. President Peres and Mr. Prime Minister; Madam Speaker, thank you very much for hosting this special session; President Beinisch; Leader of the Opposition Netanyahu; Ministers; members of the Knesset; distinguished guests: *Shalom*. Laura and I are thrilled to be back in Israel. We have been deeply moved by the celebrations of the past 2 days. And this afternoon, I am honored to stand before one of the world's greatest democratic assemblies and convey the wishes of the American people with these words: *Yom Ha'atzmaut Sameach*.

It is a rare privilege for the American President to speak to the Knesset. [Laughter] Although, the Prime Minister told me there is something even rarer: to have just one person in this chamber speaking at a time. [Laughter] My only regret is that one of Israel's greatest leaders is not here to share this moment. He is a warrior for the ages, a man of peace, a friend. The prayers of the American people are with Ariel Sharon.

We gather to mark a momentous occasion. Sixty years ago in Tel Aviv, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israel's independence, founded on the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate. What

followed was more than the establishment of a new country; it was the redemption of an ancient promise given to Abraham and Moses and David, a homeland for the chosen people, *Eretz Yisrael*.

Eleven minutes later, on the orders of President Harry Truman, the United States was proud to be the first nation to recognize Israel's independence. And on this landmark anniversary, America is proud to be Israel's closest ally and best friend in the world.

The alliance between our governments is unbreakable, yet the source of our friendship runs deeper than any treaty. It is grounded in the shared spirit of our people, the bonds of the Book, the ties of the soul. When William Bradford stepped off the *Mayflower* in 1620, he quoted the words of Jeremiah: "Come let us declare in Zion the word of God." The Founders of my country saw a new promise land and bestowed upon their towns names like Bethlehem and New Canaan. And in time, many Americans became passionate advocates for a Jewish state.

Centuries of suffering and sacrifice would pass before the dream was fulfilled. The Jewish people endured the agony of the pogroms, the tragedy of the Great War, and the horror of the Holocaust—what Elie Wiesel called "the kingdom of the night." Soulless men took away lives and broke apart families. Yet they could not take away the spirit of the Jewish people, and they could not break the promise of God. When news of Israel's freedom finally arrived, Golda Meir, a fearless woman raised in Wisconsin, could summon only tears. She later said: "For 2,000 years, we have waited for our deliverance. Now that it is here, it is so great and wonderful that it surpasses human words."

The joy of independence was tempered by the outbreak of battle, a struggle that has continued for six decades. Yet in spite of the violence, in defiance of the threats, Israel has built a thriving democracy in the heart of the Holy Land. You have welcomed immigrants from far—from the four corners of the Earth. You have forged a free and modern society based on the love of liberty, a passion for justice, and a respect for human dignity. You have worked tirelessly for peace. You have fought valiantly for freedom.